Undergraduate Education in British Columbia: Choices for the Future

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UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION
in
BRITISH COLUMBIA:

CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

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for the
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Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology

1992

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This report was commissioned in November, 1991 by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology, in recognition of the opportunities that lie before us in the development of the post-secondary system in British Columbia. The new "university-colleges" provide a chance to look not just at expanding the system, but also to make qualitative changes--to enrich rather than just enlarge the system.

Many issues are not covered here. The main thrust of this report is the discussion of alternatives to the standard approach to arts and science education in our degree programs. Briefly touched on is the relevance of some of the ideas to career, technology, and vocational education, but that is an important topic that deserves separate and more extensive analysis. Other related topics are not included here, or are mentioned only briefly. Undergraduate learning can be improved in a great many ways, but a thorough analysis of all of those is simply beyond the scope of this report. The central purpose here is to discuss the nature of undergraduate arts and science education, and the possible diversification of that education.

A major omission is the entire matter of distance education and the future role of the Open Learning Agency in the education of undergraduates in British Columbia. Clearly the role of this institution will be significant, and the absence of discussion here of that role should not be taken in any way as an attempt to minimize that significance. There are, in fact, many ways in which open learning could stimulate and complement the development of some of the ideas in this report. It is the hope of the author that future discussions may lead in precisely that direction.

The Ministry appointed an advisory committee to help with the report. The function of this group was not to write or to edit the work, but to meet (three times in all) to make suggestions and to offer advice. The members of the committee were exceptionally effective in this role, and their assistance very much improved the report. Committee members were:

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While the responsibility for what appears here is mine, I would like to thank all of the above for their advice and assistance, and for their generosity in donating so much of their valuable time and energy to this paper.

PREFACE

It is clear then that there should be laws laid down about education, and that education itself must be made a public concern. But we must not forget the question of what that education is to be, and how one ought to be educated. For in modern times there are opposing views about the tasks to be set, for there are no generally accepted assumptions about what the young should learn, either for virtue or for the best life; nor yet is it clear whether their education ought to be conducted with more concern for the intellect than for the character of the soul. The problem has been complicated by the education we see actually given; and it is by no means certain whether training should be directed at things useful in life, or at those conducive to virtue, or at exceptional accomplishments. (All these answers have been judged correct by somebody.) [1] *Aristotle*

What should we learn of virtue, or for the best life? And what indeed is the best life? Is there general agreement, today, after another 2000 years of thought and debate, about whether we should be more concerned about the intellect, or the soul, or things useful in life? All the different answers to these questions are still judged correct by some.

The central questions in education are enduring and they are complex. They will not be resolved now or in the future by simplistic answers. Our real task, in setting policies and direction for our educational institutions, is not to find any one answer but to allow for many answers, answers of sufficient diversity to meet all of our needs.

Our colleges and universities in British Columbia have had considerable success in addressing certain needs--in developing undergraduate programs which prepare students for a variety of careers and for post-graduate studies. But there is more at stake. We should, for example, be helping students to function effectively in the society in which they will live. This does not involve only learning to make a living, it requires learning to understand the ideas that form the basis of that society and the responsibilities that come with living in such a society. We should ensure that students learn to think critically and that they become proficient in important skills such as reading, writing, and speaking, and we should encourage general intellectual development of the minds of our students by exposing them to the intellectual, spiritual, and artistic richness of human achievement.

The general thrust of our post-secondary education in B.C. parallels that in the rest of Canada and in much of the United States. We provide strong undergraduate programs that prepare students for specific careers and for specific programs of graduate studies, but we are less successful in the areas of broader general education. The focus on career and graduate studies has resulted in an approach to undergraduate education which encourages an emphasis on specialized training and research skills. This emphasis

is reflected in the curriculum, in the general learning environment, and in the attitude of institutions and of faculty toward undergraduate students. Rarely, now, do we hear talk of "concern for the intellect," or of "things . . . conducive to virtue."

In narrowing the focus of our degree programs we do not only deprive students of the personal benefits of intellectual and moral development, we deprive them as well of a very practical aspect of their education. Today's students will live in a highly mobile, very complex and very participatory community, within a rapidly changing economy. Only those with a solid foundation in general education will have the necessary adaptive capacity to function effectively in this new community.

Post-secondary education here and elsewhere has not come to its current situation either by accident or by design, but through a variety of influences that have led, inevitably, in a particular direction. For the most part there has been no conscious and deliberate weighing of priorities, but instead a yielding to obvious and immediate utility. People need jobs, so immediate placement in jobs is a high priority. Similarly, society needs research, and faculty prosper intellectually and materially through research, so we find many specialized, discipline-based programs which focus on research. But there is no parallel, compelling force that demands the general intellectual development of our students. We have a society in which our educated people are mainly specialists: experts in a narrow range of human experience, untutored and often lacking in confidence outside of the realm of their expertise. As Kenneth Hare wrote:

> *I must stress the incompetence of the established disciplines to tackle many of society's real problems. What we mean by a discipline is an agreed tested body of method--usually analytical--that we bring to bear on problems of our own choosing. The essence of our thinking is that we cannot tackle problems that do not fit the competence of our own discipline . . . The existing departmental and disciplinary structure of the university is out of kilter with the needs of action-oriented, policy-directed programs.*[2]

Who is to speak on broader issues? Who is to interrelate the ideas of narrowly-focused experts? Who will make the complex choices required of all citizens in a democracy? We need specialized education, to be sure, but we also need broader education.

The situation in British Columbia will continue as it is, emphasizing only one approach to undergraduate education, unless those with responsibility for making decisions about our institutions take deliberate action to correct the imbalance. In the absence of such deliberate action the forces which have prevailed will continue to prevail, to the detriment both of society and its students.

NOTES:

1. Aristotle, The Politics, trans. T. A. Sinclair, revised Trevor J. Saunders (Bungay: Penguin, 1981), 453.

2. F. Kenneth Hare, "How Should We Treat the Environment?" Science (January 23, 1970), 352-55.

INTRODUCTION

In our colleges and universities in British Columbia we offer some outstanding programs of undergraduate education. Colleges have provided a strong complement to universities by decentralizing the offering of the first two years of degree programs, and, with the introduction of "university-colleges" in the last few years, the range of college programs is being extended to cover degree programs. With the prospect of many colleges entering the degree-completion field it is timely that we examine the direction and purpose of such initiatives.

The first question we should ask is this: are there any serious omissions or limitations in the undergraduate programs currently available in B.C. universities?

It will be argued here that the answer to this question is that our programs are generally strong but limited in their scope. They do provide strong discipline-based preparation for graduate work. But a system which offers only traditional, discipline-based education is not sufficient for today's students, or today's society. This paper will suggest that a serious reexamination of the emphasis in our undergraduate programs is needed.

A reexamination could lead in at least three important directions. First, our university-colleges might be considered as possible sites for new programs with a different emphasis. Second, the lack of attention given to some aspects of undergraduate education in some of our existing discipline-based programs might be redressed. Third, some of the ideas and suggestions to broaden undergraduate education could be taken to support a similar broadening in many other programs, such as career, technology, and vocational programs.

University programs in Canada have not been characterized by innovation.[1] There are a number of complex reasons for this: perhaps most important is the fact that the structure of our universities militates against developments other than within a framework of traditional discipline-based programs. Therefore, alternative approaches to degrees remain largely unexplored in this country. Yet we should provide many answers to the vexing questions and problems of education, not just a few answers. The opening of new degree-completion programs in our colleges, institutions perhaps without the relatively inflexible department-based structures of the universities, provides us with valuable opportunities for the creative development of alternatives in undergraduate education, alternatives which could have an impact across the entire post-secondary system.

Much of this paper (Chapters 2, 3, and 4) is devoted to suggesting approaches to improving some aspects of undergraduate education. These areas are curriculum, learning environment, and faculty. Chapters 5 and 6 will then review, respectively, choices for institutions and implications for public policy. Choices for institutions will include choices for existing programs in colleges and universities, as well as for the new

university-colleges. The chapter on implications for public policy will suggest steps that may be taken by government to stimulate the emergence of a healthy diversity in our institutions.

Chapter 7 will be a review of the extraordinary opportunity we now have in British Columbia to bring about changes which could have a profound impact upon the education, and the lives, of generations of undergraduate students.

REVIEW OF SOME STUDIES OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

In recent years there has been intense public scrutiny of education at all levels. In British Columbia the Sullivan Royal Commission of Enquiry into Education[2] recommended far-reaching changes in our school system. The recent Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education, headed by Stuart Smith,[3] has also suggested radical change, particularly in undergraduate education. There have been many other such studies in the last decades, most of which indicate the need for change. In addition, public pressure for measures to increase the effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability of management and governance in post-secondary education has been growing.[4]

Why do we feel such concern about education? Part of the reason must be that there can be no task more central to democracy. The people are sovereign rulers in a democracy, and our rulers must be educated. Yet, in our modern times, as in the time of the ancient Greeks, "there are opposing views about the tasks to be set, for there are no generally accepted assumptions about what the young should learn."[5] Nowhere is this point more apt than in the undergraduate programs in our colleges and universities. Controversy in regard to the undergraduate curriculum is universal. We are all concerned; we do not all agree; what are we to do?

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is to be commended for engaging an "independent commission to conduct in public a critical review of their performance," as Stuart Smith says in the preface to his Report. He also indicates that the "opinions expressed . . . are solely those of the Commission."[6] While there is some understandable criticism of his views, he has collected a considerable amount of evidence, and we ought to be concerned about some of his observations in regard to undergraduate education, in particular the following:

> *Teaching is seriously undervalued at Canadian Universities and nothing less than a total re-commitment to it is required.*[7]

If this observation is accurate, then we do indeed have a serious problem in our universities. This of course is not the first such allegation. Many of the studies alluded to above make similar charges.

There has been much talk of these problems, but as Smith points out, mere talk is futile.

> *The Commission is convinced, however, that simply calling for this will accomplish very little. The experience in the United States is that repeated requests to "do the right thing" have led nowhere. The forces at play, as described earlier, are simply too powerful and even the best efforts of well meaning administrators are unlikely to make much difference.*[7]

If determined action is not taken by someone or some group with the authority to bring about change, Smith argues, then nothing much will happen. Smith continues--*"it would be a great pity if we were to continue to follow the American example with respect to the undervaluation of teaching."* Smith gives us hope, however, by pointing out that *"at least half the members of faculty at Canadian universities do not wish to do so."*[7]

In the United States some of the best work in these areas of assessing undergraduate education has been done by Ernest Boyer, working for The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In his work Boyer expresses a vision for undergraduate education that many share:

> *The undergraduate college in America, with its long and venerable tradition, has a unique mission to fulfill, one that will enrich and, at its best, transform. Why else make it the prerequisite to professional study? Why else provide college for those who otherwise could be trained on the job or in a corporate classroom? It can only be because of the conviction that something in the undergraduate experience will lead to a more competent, more concerned, more complete human being.*[8]

As President of the Carnegie Foundation Boyer was able to conduct an extensive study of undergraduate education in the United States. His findings are summarized in the following paragraph.

> *And yet, while preparing this report we found that the undergraduate college, the very heart of higher learning, is a troubled institution. In a society that makes different and contrary demands upon higher education, many of the nation's colleges are more successful in credentialing than in providing a quality education for their students.*[9]

As many others have discovered, Boyer finds that our hopes for undergraduate education are not being fulfilled in many of the programs we find in our colleges and universities. The problems that arise in undergraduate education in colleges and universities are due in large measure to a loss in vision and a loss of purpose. Students are confused by the apparently conflicting demands of obtaining a particular credential or pursuing a more general education.

Smith suggests a number of measures that might be taken to improve education in universities. None of the measures he suggests, however, is likely to lead to the "total recommitment" he believes to be necessary. When do we begin to consider, seriously, such recommitment? Perhaps now is the time in this Province, with the emergence of the new degree-granting institutions, to encourage the development of alternatives that truly would imply recommitment to teaching.

DIVERSITY

There is a temptation to claim that by choosing alternatives one will create better institutions. That may or may not be the case. What does seem clear is that we can create different institutions which have different strengths. Of course by placing a higher emphasis on teaching we run the risk of undervaluing research. Society is probably best served by a diversity of post-secondary institutions, some with a research focus and some with a teaching focus, offering the best possible opportunity for students--the clients of these institutions--to make their choices among them.

We do not, at present, have a post-secondary system in British Columbia which offers much choice at all, particularly in its undergraduate arts and science education. Our institutions offer programs of study which are mostly based upon undergraduate curricula as set up by university departments: mostly majors and honours programs in traditional academic disciplines. The purpose of such curricula is to provide a grounding in a particular discipline, so that one can either work in a related field or progress to post-graduate study in the discipline. It is sometimes argued that such education can also provide a good general education, by providing depth in a particular discipline while allowing some opportunity for study outside the discipline. But it is the discipline, not broader education, which is the focus. Courses, particularly upper-level courses, concentrate upon specialized interests. The skills which are taught are largely those skills necessary to conduct research or professional practice in one particular field. There is relatively little interaction between instructors in different courses, nor is there much interrelating of curriculum, because the focus is upon specialization, not interdisciplinary study.

There is, at the same time, much to be said in favour of arts and sciences curricula as we find them in the Province of British Columbia. Those students who go on to graduate school have the benefit of concentrated study directly relevant to their future studies. There are real advantages to having a solid grounding in a discipline, and there are obvious pedagogical advantages to being close to the front lines of research. Were things otherwise in our undergraduate programs in B.C., this paper might well be a plea for an increased emphasis upon specialization in some of our arts and sciences programs. If our programs placed too great an emphasis on teaching we might be guilty of undervaluing research and specialization. The fundamental concern of this paper is advocacy for diversity, rather than uniformity, in our undergraduate programs.

The problem with our existing programs is not that they are specialized, for specialization is of value, nor that they are research-oriented, for that too is of value. The problem is that the system is monolithic. We have followed the trend in North American colleges and universities by adopting a standard approach: in a time of need for diversity we offer little diversity, particularly in our approach to undergraduate arts and science education. Superficially there are differences, but a sociology program from one institution closely resembles that from another, as does a chemistry program or any other traditional discipline-based program. The same originality and imagination which is so honoured at the frontiers of research is much less encouraged when manifested as innovation in undergraduate teaching. As Boyer observes "campus priorities are frequently more *imitative* than *distinctive*."[10]

NOTES:

1. A comprehensive review of innovation in curriculum in Canadian Universities was provided in Research Report #4, written for the Smith Commission of Inquiry (see below). The report, written by C. Mathurin and C. Knapper shows many new and different activities in our universities, but very little in the way of developments in the areas that are the subject of this paper: general education, learning environment and serious initiatives to place increased emphasis on teaching.

2. Province of British Columbia. A Legacy for Learners: The Report of the Royal Commission on Education, 1988. Barry Martin Sullivan, Commissioner.

3. Stuart L. Smith. Report - Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa, 1991.

4. Among the better known official and non-official studies of this question in Canada and the United States are the Report of the Royal Commission on Post-Secondary Education (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1985), Wilfred Cude, The Ph.D. Trap (West Bay, Nova Scotia: 1988), Paul von Blum, Stillborn Education (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), Charles J. Sykes, Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1988), Lynne V. Cheney, 50 Hours (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1989), and a number of reports from the Carnegie Institute, studies by Ernest Boyer, and the publications in the New Directions for Teaching and Learning series.

5. Aristotle, The Politics, trans. T.A. Sinclair, revised Trevor J. Saunders (Bungay: Penguin, 1989), 453.

6. Stuart L. Smith, Preface.

7. Stuart L. Smith, 63.

8. Ernest L. Boyer. College: The Undergraduate Experience in America. Harper & Row, New York and Toronto, 1987. 1.

9. Boyer, 2.

10. Ernest L. Boyer. Scholarship Reconsidered. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Princeton, NJ, 1990. 2.

CHAPTER 1: THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

The campus I encountered (in my imagination) was unlike those I had seen elsewhere in Canada. I think that the biggest difference was one of community. There was a sense of community in everything that occurred there; the faculty worked closely with each other in preparing cnd teaching a curriculum, the students studied together at least as much as they did privately, and the students and the faculty seemed to share an intense commitment to undergraduate learning. I was startled by this at first because I had always thought of scholarly work as essentially private and personal, something that, for the most part, one must do alone. One attends classes, to be sure, but the serious work, the real learning, is done in the privacy of one's study, or in the library. Here students would congregate in relaxed lounge areas where they would work together on assignments and projects, helping each other, cooperating with each other. One might have expected that the good students would resist involvement with the weaker ones. In an age of intense competition, what could they gain by helping others to understand what they already understood? But to my astonishment they believed such help to be an integral part of their learning; both the stronger and the weaker students were enriched by the experience. The students spoke not of grades but of the importance of creating an intellectual community . . . . to be continued.

Well over half of all undergraduate students in British Columbia take their B.A. degree in the humanities and social sciences, and the same is true for Canada as a whole.[1] Overwhelmingly, these students earn their degree by taking a major or honours program in one or another of the disciplines. They become specialists in accounting or anthropology, or one of the dozens of other possibilities which our universities provide. If they are lucky, these students also have some room in the program for electives, and they can select these from hundreds, if not thousands, of specialized courses mostly designed for majors in other disciplines.

It is the argument of this chapter that this form of undergraduate education does not serve the needs of all students. Perhaps it does not even serve the needs of most students.

GOALS OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

The goals of undergraduate education are generally recognized to be:

1. a grounding in the fundamentals of an academic discipline, with the possibility of preparation for graduate school, and

2. preparation for entry into a professional school, and

3. preparation for specific careers, and

4. the achievement of a reasonable level of competence in general intellectual skills such as reading, writing, and critical thinking, and

5. the gaining of some basic understanding of the important ideas that form the basis of the global culture in which we live, and the gaining of a sense of the various areas of enquiry and the interrelationships between them.

It is now a well-established tradition in our universities that most undergraduate programs focus upon goal 1, specialization in a discipline and preparation for graduate school.[2] It is also true that this traditional education provides students with entry into professional programs (goal 2), and prepares students for a career in a discipline (goal 3), although a great many students go on to work in entirely different fields.

Only rarely, however, can we find programs which are explicitly designed to achieve goals 4 and 5, and which do so in a serious and structured manner. Most of our current programs are not so designed; they are, quite simply, meant to prepare students for graduate studies in their respective disciplines. Some of the more general benefits of education will accrue to any student in any university program, but there is no reason to think that the traditional approach, focused on the needs of one discipline, is particularly effective in this regard.

The current emphasis in our undergraduate programs might be considered appropriate, if goal 1 reflects the real needs of students, and the real needs of society. This chapter will examine both of these needs so as to provide a framework for examination of the emphasis we now place upon the pursuit of discipline-based education with a focus on future graduate studies.

THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

What do most students actually do after graduation? If most students did go on to graduate school then it might be argued that existing, traditional discipline-based programs adequately fill the primary need, and that the first goal is of predominant importance. But most students do not go to graduate school, as the following data illustrates.

For 1989-90 there were 555,999 full-time students enroled in undergraduate (including first year professional, excluding career programs) programs in Canadian colleges and universities. For the same period there were 61,580 full-time graduate students. Part-time enrolments were 335,650 undergraduates, and 39,033 graduate students. The overall totals are 891,649 undergraduates, and 100,613 graduate students.

In other words, there are roughly nine undergraduate students for every graduate student. If we were to include career program students, we would add 214,140 full-time students and 111,016 part-time students, for an additional 331,156 to be added to the undergraduate total, which would then be 1,222,805.[3]

Simply on the basis of numbers one can formulate a strong case for the importance of education designed for undergraduates in colleges and universities. Numbers are not the whole story, of course, because even though there are relatively few people involved, graduate education and research clearly play a valuable role in society; it is difficult to imagine a civilized society which would not place a high value on such activities. But the numbers are still significant. We would not wish to see the needs of the greater number of undergraduates subordinated to those of a much smaller number of graduate students.

It is instructive, as well, to look at the programs students take. Well over one-half of the undergraduates in B.C. and in Canada are in humanities, social science, or general arts and science programs. The next single biggest group is education. The majority of undergraduate students, then, take programs which are not specifically tied to employment opportunities, although in some cases, particularly in the social sciences such as economics and psychology, students see the same direct, linear connection with employment that students in the sciences and engineering see. In any case it appears that the majority of students are headed neither for graduate school nor for occupations for which they are specifically trained.

The standard approach to undergraduate education serves one goal for undergraduate education very well--preparation for graduate school--it fails to serve other student needs in at least two important ways:

1) It fails to address, directly, the broader educational needs of students, as described in goals 4 and 5 above; it focuses upon the issues and concerns of only one area of scholarship, rather than broad conceptual understanding and generic skills. This failure is much more than a failure to prepare students to cope with future society. It is a failure to provide the opportunity for students to experience the intellectual stimulation and growth which will enrich all aspects of their future lives. An ability to respond to literary allusion, and a sensitivity to artistic expression, for example, are aspects of intelligent human life that prosper in an atmosphere where intellectual interests are nurtured. Such nurturing will not likely occur in the rough world outside of our educational institutions, and students who miss such an experience will be forever impoverished by it.

2) In many cases it does not address, effectively, goals 2 and 3; it does not provide an ideal preparation either for the professional schools or for employment. In part,

this is because it suffers from the problem of obsolescence: the emphasis upon ideas and skills applicable to only one area of study means that learning rapidly falls out of date. This is not a particular problem for those who continue to work in a given field, for their knowledge and skills will presumably progress as the field progresses. It does mean, however, that students who go on to work in other areas, or who move out of the particular field for a period of time, will find that what they learned as undergraduates remains of little specific relevance to them.

Subsequent chapters in this paper will examine ways that undergraduate education can more effectively address student needs.

THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY

A further question to ask is which goals of undergraduate programs are important for society? Joseph Tussman, philosopher from Berkeley and creator of an experimental program at Berkeley in the 60's, tells a story something like the following:

An alien space ship has landed. A young, human-like creature emerges and we are told that this creature will, in four years, be installed as the sovereign ruler of our nation. There is nothing we can do about this, because a higher power has made the decision. It is useless to resist. The reason for the four-year interval is that our designated ruler needs to be educated; it needs to learn enough in four years to be able to make wise decisions about how to exercise the universal authority it will assume at that time.

We now must decide how to educate this alien. First, of course, we do an assessment, and we find that it has already been educated to the level of high school graduation. Now we have four years to provide post-secondary education for our future sovereign. What shall we do? Shall we give it a BA in English literature, in the hope that it can learn to communicate well? Shall we give it the intellectual richness of a degree in philosophy, or should it study history, so it will learn of the past and we will not be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past? Or should it study political science or maybe economics? But what about the sciences--shouldn't it know something of biology and ecology, because of our environmental problems, or perhaps chemistry or physics or mathematics, which provide more basic understanding of scientific issues? Maybe all that this creature needs is a degree in computer science, so it can better understand the modern information technology, or sociology in order to understand social systems, or psychology to understand the individuals that comprise society, or anthropology, or geography, or . . . maybe it should study theatre so it can learn to perform in front of television cameras, or marketing, which is at the heart of modern politics, or. . . . Then there is the matter of technical education--shouldn't the creature be familiar with practical issues? And what about physical education--a healthy body means a healthy mind? All of these things are important. What are we going to do?

That, of course, is the central question in education, and perhaps the central question of democracy. Because we live in a democracy our citizens are sovereign--they will have absolute power to govern. Is it sufficient to give them degrees in chemistry or anthropology; does this do justice to their needs and to what society needs of them? Perhaps so, but some alternatives are worth considering.

To continue with the story of the alien, should it not be familiar with other important ideas that have shaped the society that we live in? If it is going to assume leadership in ignorance of all of our traditions and practices, and the reasons for them, is it likely to act wisely? Even if it decides that some of those traditions and practices are not desirable, surely it would be important for it to understand why they exist. Surely it would have to study the Greeks who gave so much to the development of western society. And aside from the many things the creature must read, what about learning to work collaboratively with others? If it is simply going to take courses in relative isolation, how will it learn this critically important skill of working in groups? However much it learns, its decisions will improve if they are made in collaboration with others, and somehow it must learn to practice this skill.[4]

Tussman's story makes clear the real task of undergraduate education, at least in regard to society's needs. Democracy requires educated citizens. Such education can occur to a greater or lesser degree in discipline-based programs, or it can be more specifically addressed in alternative programs. The problem in most discipline-based programs is that the priority usually rests with the discipline, and broader goals are secondary, often distantly so. It is important to emphasize that this need not be the case. There are institutions such as McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and Reed College in Portland, Oregon, which are both discipline-based and which offer superb programs of broader education. However, the pursuit of a well-rounded education for undergraduates is often overshadowed in discipline-based programs by an emphasis upon graduate studies and research. This emphasis is demonstrated in many ways, for example:

1) The dominant undergraduate programs in most universities are majors and honours programs in disciplines, and the curricula for such programs are largely determined by the requirements for entry into graduate programs.

2) Promotion and tenure are based mostly on accomplishments in research. Despite frequent claims to the contrary, teaching rarely plays a significant part in promotion and tenure, and sometimes it plays a negative part.[5] Academics seeking tenure find themselves in a desperate competition with their peers to publish original research; not only is time spent on teaching, particularly teaching unrelated to their research, a distraction from their primary interest, but time spent on one's undergraduate students may be viewed as a retreat from one's real task, which is seen as research.[6]

3) In most universities there is no effective mechanism for ensuring that the overall education of undergraduates is being considered; instead this responsibility falls to departments. As Clark Kerr wrote:

> *Professors . . . are not now positioned to think creatively and responsibly about what a comprehensive and coherent college education ought to be.*[7]

Departments generally consider that their first allegiance is to the "community of scholars," which addresses only certain student needs, rather than to the internal community of undergraduate students, with its full range of educational needs. Departments are, therefore, primarily concerned with standards and with the reputation they can establish within their disciplines, and the expectations of national and international scholars within that discipline. While this helps create strong discipline-based programs, it evades the broader responsibilities of undergraduate education.

The reasons for this situation are well-known (see Smith, Boyer, Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Education, and many others). Clark Kerr, the retired chancellor of the University of California in Berkeley, endorsed in 1984 the Carnegie Council's Mission of the Colleges Curricula (1977), warning that "*general education . . . is a disaster area*" and that it is "*the only education in the country which was considered critically deficient.*" Both Kerr and the Council had no doubt as to the reason: the rising emphasis on majors and honours programs, designed for the purpose of pursuing careers in research.[8]

We ought to question what all of this does for our society. Are we doing enough to educate our people in their responsibilities as citizens? We owe it to our society, and our students, to consider ways of broadening existing programs, as well as seeking some alternatives which are explicitly designed to provide programs of broader education. Chapter 2 in particular focuses on this issue.

THE PROBLEM OF ATTRITION

A research report entitled Attrition in Canadian Universities was recently completed in conjunction with the Stuart Smith Report. The major finding included an estimate of a 42% non-completion rate for undergraduates in Canada. This figure is not the actual drop-out rate, because it includes students who elect to take longer periods to complete their degrees as well as students who transfer to other institutions. However the figures are high and appear to be increasing.[9]

The figures show a considerable range in rates, ranging from 15% to 68% for individual institutions. Some of this difference is attributable to the selectiveness of

admissions procedures, but there are clearly a number of other significant factors. The report discusses some of those factors and reviews extensive research from the United States indicating a strong relationship between "academic and social involvement" and retention. Academic and social involvement refers to a variety of ways that students can participate "in formal and informal university life and activities" which "enhance persistence and retard departure." Such participation is increased in a variety of ways, such as making "campuses more interesting and enjoyable places" and providing "more or better assistance in a range of non-classroom services." In regard to the classroom, "first-rate instruction, meaningful faculty-student contact, and active involvement in learning" are of central importance.[10]

The report goes on to summarize the principles of effective retention as determined by researcher Vincent Tinto, the first of which was that "*universities are social and intellectual communities in which it is especially important to have frequent and rewarding contact between students, faculty, and staff both within and outside of the classroom.*"[11] Much of what is included in the next three chapters is directed toward such "frequent and rewarding contact."

THE ISSUE OF REPUTATION

Those seeking change in university programs are plagued by question of reputation. Somehow we have reached a point in our society where the reputation of a degree-granting institution is largely assessed by its eminence in the field of research (although occasionally an attempt is made to do otherwise--as in a recent and questionable article in Maclean's Magazine[12]). Any change in approach to undergraduate education which in any way diminishes this emphasis placed by the institution and its faculty upon graduate studies and research is seen as a threat to the institution's reputation.

Most surveys of the "best" universities measure their standing in the international community of scholars, not in the effectiveness with which they educate students from their own communities. This assessment of research achievement may be important for some universities, and for the relatively few students who will be seeking further education and graduate degrees at prominent research-based institutions, but it does not serve most undergraduate students. It is possible, for example, that the undergraduate experience of students in small colleges or universities in Canada and the United States is richer for many students than that obtained in a large, world-famous institution. Some well-known institutions, of course, do provide good undergraduate programs, but the presence of Nobel-prize winners on their faculties is no guarantee of a good undergraduate experience (particularly when some of them do not come near the undergraduate classroom).

So long as the criterion for institutional excellence is held to be success in research we can hope for little real change in our approach to undergraduate education, and diversity will not prosper. It is imperative, if we are going to begin to consider the needs of the greater number of students, as well as the broader needs of society, that our assessment of excellence be broadened. We, as a society, must aim for excellence in the undergraduate learning experience, and develop criteria for its excellence. Included in such criteria would be evidence of the richness of curricula, of the nature of the learning environment, and of the commitment and teaching effectiveness of faculty, as well as such measures as subsequent assessments of graduates and by graduates.

What would happen if we simply decided that we in the Province of British Columbia would unilaterally change the ground rules--that we would establish criteria for our own institutions that would require only that they strive for the best possible undergraduate learning experiences? Would graduates of institutions which provided such experiences be shunned by the academic community? Would British Columbia degrees be regarded as inferior?

We can be confident that excellent graduates from excellent undergraduate programs will be in demand by employers, by professional schools, and by graduate schools. The need for research credibility is real for only a very few students--those who are intent upon graduate studies in top research institutions where there is extensive competition for entry. Then the research reputation of the institution of origin might be a factor, although even then it will be mitigated by such factors as Graduate Record Exam results.

There are many small American colleges and universities, without extensive achievement in research, that have established strong reputations for their undergraduate programs. Worldwide the number of illustrations is much greater. The graduates of these institutions are in demand, because of the richness of their education, not because of the research accomplishments of their faculty. It is time that we in British Columbia saw the development of institutions that provide new and much needed opportunities for our students. If, instead, we think that credibility demands that all our institutions must be alike, we will be missing a real opportunity to improve the educational possibilities for our undergraduate students.

NOTES:

1. Education in Canada: A Statistical Review for 1989-90. Cat. 81-229. Minister of Industry, Science, and Technology, Ottawa, 1991. 88-95.

2. See, for example, Clark Kerr. The Great Transformation in Higher Education, 1960-1980. State University of New York Press, 1991. 63. "It [the undergraduate curriculum] has come under the

dictatorship of the graduate program . . . with its emphasis upon specialization and its downgrading of undergraduate instruction."

3. Education in Canada, 66-67.

4. J. Dixon, personal communication.

5. See, for example, Profscam. Charles J. Sykes. St. Martins Press, New York, 1990.

6. A particularly revealing glimpse into these issues is provided in Ernest Boyer's Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. The Carnegie Foundation For The Advancement Of Teaching. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.

7. Clark Kerr. The Great Transformation in Higher Education, 1960-1980. State University of New York Press, 1991. 300.

8. Clark Kerr, "Liberal Learning: A Record of Presidential Neglect," Change September 1984: 33.

9. Attrition in Canadian Universities. Research Report #1. Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education. Ottawa, Ontario, 1991.

10. Attrition in Canadian Universities, 16-17.

11. Attrition in Canadian Universities, 17.

12. Maclean's Magazine. October 21, 1991.

CHAPTER 2: THE CURRICULUM

I was struck by the difference in the curriculum at this campus. There were no programs which led, exclusively, to narrow specialization, but all were designed to provide a strong element of general education. All students had intensive work in writing, critical thinking, speaking, debating, and working collaboratively. All students read important works outside of their immediate course of study, and they learned to study these works from the perspective of an inquisitive and intelligent non-specialist. No areas of enquiry were closed off to them. Arts students were not intimidated by science because they knew enough of the conceptual foundations of science to have a general understanding of it, and they had sufficient confidence to know that with work they could go beyond an initial conceptual understanding to a more detailed understanding. Science students read the Greeks and Shakespeare, they talked of Machiavelli in relation to contemporary abuses of power, and they argued about the meaning of democracy. These students had less specialized work in particular disciplines, but somehow they seemed better equipped to participate in our complex society . . . . to be continued.

There are many aspects to teaching and learning in degree programs; one of the most important, obviously, is curriculum. Curriculum can be separated into two parts--one which provides specific learning about specific areas of enquiry; the other which provides learning of a more general nature. While not always separate in practice, these two represent important and distinct emphases in curriculum. The former is strongly emphasized in most traditional university programs, the latter less so. This chapter argues for balance between the two.

General education is, ostensibly, one of the central objectives of virtually every college and university in North America. Much has been written on the topic of general education, and ideas about it have grown and changed over many decades. The current state of thinking on the topic is described by the definition of Gary E. Miller, a definition which has the virtue of comprehensiveness, if not of linguistic elegance.

> *General education is a comprehensive, self-consciously developed and maintained program that develops in individual students the attitude of inquiry; the skills of problem solving; the individual and community values associated with a democratic society; and the knowledge needed to apply these attitudes, skills, and values so that the students may maintain the learning process over a lifetime and function as self-fulfilled individuals and as full participants in a society committed to change through democratic processes. As such, it is marked by its comprehensive scope, by its emphasis on specific and real problems and issues of immediate concern to students and society, by its concern with the needs of the future, and by the application of democratic principles in the methods and procedures of education as well as the goals of education.*[1]

Another way of describing the purpose of general education, Miller points out, is that traditional higher education programs stress the individual, while general education places an increased emphasis upon the community and the individual in relation to the community. An individual exploring the frontiers of research, for example, needs to know certain kinds of things to function effectively in such work, but this knowledge does not necessarily include a deep conceptual understanding of the purpose of his or her work, nor does it require that the individual have much sense of his or her role and responsibilities in a complex democratic society. Discipline-based education focuses not upon broad understanding and responsibilities, but upon the particular understanding and responsibilities one has to one's discipline, which are essentially individual and impersonal. General education provides knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively as a member of a community.

There is extensive work being done in various institutions in the United States to explore and develop the idea of general education.[2] There is, in fact, a widespread expectation in American colleges and universities that the first two years of post-secondary education will be years of general education, and the last two will consist of specialization. It is useful to summarize the thrust of the general education movement, as described by American educator Jerry Gaff. He identifies thirteen characteristics of the general education movement:

1. Liberal arts subject matter is coming back into the curriculum in many programs; it is being viewed not as a "frill" but as essential.

2. Fundamental skills are receiving an increased emphasis, e.g., skills in writing, reading, mathematics, computers.

3. Standards for programs in general education are increasing--more required courses are being specified, and higher admissions required.

4. Tougher curriculum requirements are being set, such as common core courses. Distribution requirements are increasingly being seen as inadequate (see below).

5. Freshman year programs are being modified to emphasize personal and intellectual development.

6. Senior year programs are being seen as special opportunities to pull together four years of learning.

7. Global studies, emphasizing the study of other peoples, are becoming more common.

8. Cultural pluralism, stressing race, class and gender issues, is becoming a common feature of programs.

9. Many attempts are being made to integrate knowledge more effectively; thematic and interdisciplinary courses are being offered.

10. Values are being examined more extensively; technical expertise is insufficient, moral reflection is encouraged.

11. Progress is being made in extending general education throughout the four years of degree programs. General education is being seen not just as a foundation, taken in the lower years, but a framework for specialization, a framework which grows as the individual grows.

12. General education often stresses more active learning programs, with group interactions and experiential learning.

13. Assessment of existing and new curricula is becoming more common, allowing more determination of the effectiveness of traditional and alternative curricula.[3]

Many will agree that these characteristics all represent healthy trends in undergraduate education, trends away from traditional discipline-based programs. Many others, of course, feel these trends are wrong, that traditional programs cannot afford to diminish the current discipline content, and that such content should increase rather than decrease. A comparison of two approaches--one a traditional discipline-based program, the other a modified program offering a diminished discipline content and an increased general education component, helps to clarify the issues (see Table 1). The table looks at several relevant issues, including some drawn from Gaff's list of thirteen. The arguments are sound on both sides, indicating again the need for diversity in the system.

A consideration of this comparison suggests not that all discipline-based education should be abandoned, but that general education should be a factor in the undergraduate education of all students. The choice need not be one or the other--discipline-based programs can have a significant component of general education. This can occur in a number of ways.

WAYS OF APPROACHING GENERAL EDUCATION

There are several basic ways to approach general education, some of which can be introduced by individual instructors, others which require collaboration with other instructors and/or institutional support. Three of the most important ways are discussed below.

1. Individual Courses

Instructors may introduce elements of general education in any of the courses they teach. This can be done by stressing conceptual, historical, and philosophical

aspects of one's discipline, and in many other ways (as suggested by Gaff's thirteen points). This is a choice that any instructor can make in teaching any course.

2. Distribution Requirements

Institutions may set "distribution" requirements for any program, designating that a selection of courses must be taken from certain areas, for example, some from humanities, social science, and science. This is by far the most common approach to general education, but it has certain limitations.

- Such a program may have little coherence; there rarely is any consistent plan or approach to the curriculum.

- Distribution requirements may lead to a program which has no "core" (or which has a "hollow core," as has been claimed of Harvard University's famous general program).[4]

Distribution requirements can be useful, for example, by requiring that science students take a course in the humanities. However, distribution requirements, because of a lack of structure and specificity, usually do not provide a strong program of general education. Boyer writes of the distribution requirement:

> *Each course, standing alone, may be first rate. But it stretches the imagination to say that a blend of Italian, health education, and economics--or most of the other randomly selected combinations we observed--offers a general education worthy of the name. Through such a program, undergraduates pick and choose their way to graduation, using what the food service people call the "scramble system." This cafeteria-like arrangement offers a smattering of courses. Students move from one narrow department requirement to another, rarely discovering connections, rarely seeing the whole.*[5]

3. Coordinated Curriculum

A more fruitful approach to general education involves various attempts to coordinate the different subjects, so that the total program emphasises certain intellectual skills across the curriculum and thus makes general education objectives as important as or more important than disciplinary objectives (specialized knowledge and discipline-specific methodologies). Coordinating the curriculum sets general education priorities which are not the sole property or responsibility of one department.

> The key element here is to get faculty to work together to achieve certain important pedagogical aims (writing, critical thinking) and to reinforce each other's efforts. Without such faculty coordination, the courses will remain largely disconnected.
>
> Coordinating the curriculum can take a number of forms, from relatively uncontroversial first-year one- or two-course initiatives to a fully coordinated curriculum in all years of the degree program: parallel courses (with coordinated reading lists), a common emphasis on writing requirements by different faculty in different courses (writing across the curriculum), team teaching courses (either two or more different courses taught in parallel or two or more teachers from different disciplines teaching a common curriculum) or even to a fully integrated core program in which a group of teachers focuses on a single curriculum.

An important note should be added to the earlier comments about reputation. It was argued that excellent undergraduate programs can establish their own reputation, without the necessity of research achievements by faculty. It is also possible for alternative programs, particularly radical ones such as integrated core programs, to lose all credibility if the programs offered are not substantive. Traditional programs have the advantage of replicating familiar and acceptable approaches. Alternatives must create their own reputation through their own excellence.

Programs such as integrated core programs must not be seen as outlets for faculty to pursue idiosyncratic or ideological interests, which might be inadmissible in traditional programs where there are disciplinary guidelines to guard against expropriation of the curriculum. If alternative programs become Trojan Horses, smuggling in subversions of all traditional curriculum values, then such programs will justly lose all credibility. There must be some means of maintaining substance and maintaining standards. These programs must not be easier or less challenging but represent serious academic study, albeit in a different format.

The argument is not that all faculty in such programs must be the same, or have similar viewpoints: on the contrary, the vitality of integrated and team-taught programs comes, in part, from the civil expression and debate of differences. But such programs must not be hijacked by colleagues who pursue an agenda which would be prohibited by the expected requirements of a discipline. It would be difficult, for example, for an institution to defend the academic integrity of an alternative program which replaced traditional academic programs with one which required no substantive reading. Similarly, it would be difficult to defend an integrated core program, ostensibly designed to provide a strong core of general education, which instead devoted itself to pursuit of one current political cause.

Institutions must take particular care to ensure that alternative programs deliver something of substance and value. Otherwise, the skepticism which much of the academic community has for such programs will prove justified. The students who graduate from alternative programs will prove the effectiveness of such programs, or their ineffectiveness.

NOTES:

1. Miller, Gary E. The Meaning of General Education: The Emergence of a Curriculum Paradigm. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1988. For an excellent overview of the meaning and implications of General Education, see A New Vitality in General Education (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1988).

2. See, among many other studies, Laurie L. Lewis and Elizabeth Farris, Undergraduate General Education and Humanities Requirements, Higher Education Surveys Report, Survey 7 (Rockville, MD: Westate Research Inc, January 1989).

3. J. Gaff. Presentation at the Thirty-First Annual Conference of the Association for General and Liberal Studies, October 16 - 19, 1991, Bellevue/Seattle, Washington.

4. Nelson, Caleb. "Harvard's Hollow 'Core'." The Atlantic Monthly. September 1990: 70-80.

5. Ernest L. Boyer. College: The Undergraduate Experience in America. Harper and Row, New York and Toronto, 1987. 90.

TABLE 1

ARGUMENTS FOR DIVERSITY

Issue	Options Stressing Discipline-Based Programs	Options Stressing General Education
Home base theory	Students require a strong grounding in a particular discipline, so that they can become familiar with the process of the pursuit of knowledge as it is practised by those engaged in the process, and they can come to understand and feel comfortable with advanced and current thought in at least one area of inquiry. This argument is the "home base" theory: students must have an academic area in which they feel confidence and for which they have in-depth understanding, and from which they can explore other areas of thought, if they so wish.	This argument suggests that we best equip students not by giving them the narrowed perspectives of an "expert" or specialist, but by preparing them to deal with issues in the way they will have to (or ought to) deal with most issues in their lives, by teaching them to think with critical detachment and with a wide breadth of understanding of ideas and of human behaviour. Also, a home base can equally well be a horizontal cross cutting rather than a vertical discipline specialization.
Methodology	One should learn to view the world from the perspective of one of the established disciplines. This provides a systematic methodology for enquiry; students with this shall have an advantage over those who do not.	The particular methodology of disciplines may not be of much value in dealing with issues beyond the academic realm, particularly issues not closely related to the discipline.
Standards	We know what we are doing in traditional, discipline-based programs. We are providing education with established value, and established standards. Anything else opens the	While it is commonly assumed that specialization is the same as depth, a case can be made that specialization itself engenders a particular kind of superficiality-

	door to superficiality. A majors degree in English, for example, has well-established norms that are similar across North America. We know roughly what to expect of a person with such a degree. What would we be able to expect of degrees with no established standards or norms?	-that it provides a narrow rather than a broad perspective. Alternative programs must be carefully designed to ensure that they do encourage students to explore ideas in depth, and that they learn to recognize the many different kinds of complexities in issues they will deal with.
General Education	Students do learn more than a discipline by studying a discipline in detail. Disciplines are not divorced from the real world, but are ways of looking at the real world. Discipline-based education can be viewed as general education, strengthened by knowledge of a particular methodology, and by in-depth knowledge in a particular area.	Advocates of general education say that a curriculum designed to develop general intellectual skills, and to encourage critical thinking skills, and to provide a broad, general knowledge base, would likely be quite different from a discipline-based curriculum.
Graduate School	Even though most students do not go on to graduate school, all should have the option of doing so. Discipline-based programs provide the best opportunity for graduate study.	Should all undergraduate curriculum be designed for the minority who go to graduate school? A broad education does offer the alternative of graduate work, although often requiring qualifying work in disciplines. A discipline-based education may forgo the one chance most students will have for a broader education.
Required Specialized Content	With the explosion of knowledge in all fields it is not practical to think of reducing the specialized content of programs. Indeed, to keep current, and just to begin to understand	There is so much to know in a specialized area that it is impractical to think of undergraduates coming to terms with it. It is better to think of preparing students with

	what is going on in a particular area, we need to know much more, not less.	conceptual frameworks and general skills, so that they can pursue detailed knowledge in a particular area later, if they so wish.
Liberal Arts Subject Matter	Again, it is a matter of time. If we view one of the central purposes of undergraduate education to prepare students with a basic grounding in at least one academic discipline, then such is the state of most disciplines that it becomes virtually a full-time requirement to do this in four years. Students do not spend all of their time taking courses in their major, of course, but expansion of knowledge in a discipline is placing more and more demands upon the curriculum. It is not wrong for students to have elements which broaden their education, but it is difficult, now, to do both.	Liberal arts courses provide a broad conceptual framework and general skills which are more important than extensive grounding in a particular discipline. Some students will benefit from a focus on a discipline, others from a stronger emphasis on general education; both should be available. The framework provided by a discipline is not always useful when confronting issues and problems in real life, where the ability to think critically in a general sense, outside of the parameters of one's discipline, becomes paramount.
Fundamental Intellectual Skills	Students in disciplines do practice those fundamental skills--reading, writing, speaking, mathematics--but to the extent and in the fashion necessary for the work they will do in the discipline. It is impossible to supply all possible such skills; it is better to provide those needed for one particular discipline, so that students will learn what is required there and will feel more confident and be better able to pursue needed skills in other areas.	Good basic intellectual skills have nothing directly to do with disciplines. All students should learn to write clearly, to read effectively, to speak and debate well, and to think critically, to work with others, and to operate computers and carry out basic mathematical operations. All of these are covered incidentally in discipline-based programs, where the central focus is learning about the discipline. Systematic and conscious attempts to build these skills will be more effective.

Dilution of the Curriculum	Standards for these programs are well-established and well-understood. Diluting the requirements to add general education components will weaken the discipline-based program, for advantages which are unclear and speculative. Many general education programs have simply amounted to a lowering of standards.	It is essential that any programs of general education which reduce specialized program content, or which replace it, must establish clear structures and rigorous standards. Otherwise such programs will continue to be seen as weaker, more superficial alternatives.
Curriculum Requirements	Discipline-based programs have extensive and particular course requirements which ensure a level of rigor which does not exist in many alternative programs. The most common requirement for general education, for example, is a distribution requirement, which simply indicates that students need only take some courses from various lists. Usually no specific courses are required, and such requirements have no guarantee of standard or rigor. Core courses offered by departments in their disciplines, as requirements for discipline-based degrees, ensure certain standards. Departments offering such courses for their own students will be quite conscious of standards because their own reputations are at stake. Departments offering courses to students as electives are inevitably less concerned about the standards or the students, who are inevitably less committed than students concentrating in that discipline.	The distribution requirement is a poor substitute for core requirements in a discipline. A distribution requirement does not ensure any coherence to a general education program, and may or may not produce general education of value. Such a requirement is a poor substitute for a well-organized discipline-based program. To be considered as worthy contenders for recognition along with discipline-based programs, general education programs should have extensive and clear requirements which serve the goals of general education, which surely are no easier to achieve than the goals of discipline-based education, and should require no less structure or rigor.

Global Studies, Cultural Pluralism	Such studies can, to some extent, be incorporated into a regular discipline-based program. Disciplines give a solid perspective from which such issues can be viewed.	General education programs, because of reduced discipline content, are usually better able to accommodate such concerns; indeed they can be made explicit rather than peripheral concerns.
Integration	Disciplines generally provide in-depth examination of various issues from the individualistic perspective of different instructors. Students observe such individual thought processes and learn to make connections themselves; the institution's role is to present ideas and approaches, the student's role is to integrate what he or she learns. That is not to say that some integration of course material cannot be done in disciplines, but that the preferred method of instruction is one that allows the maximum degree of freedom for an instructor to pursue ideas and enquiries in the manner he or she finds most agreeable. This will allow for individuality to flourish and it allows each instructor to find his or her best approach to teaching. Placing the burden on the student to integrate knowledge represents a valuable learning experience.	Too often the differing and often idiosyncratic views of instructors are left unchallenged by students who often feel unqualified to question points of view, and feel obliged to accept these points of view for the purpose of succeeding in the course. Assistance in integrating knowledge, through team-teaching, does not result in homogenization, but in bringing conflicting points of view into the open and making them the subject of discussion. Integration through interdisciplinary and thematic programs provides students with insights they often miss when taking isolated courses.
Values	Discipline study does not necessarily lend itself to the study of values (except of course for those aspects of some disciplines specifically concerned with values). In fact, the goal of much academic study is to attempt to seek knowledge in a value-free manner.	Programs of general education are much more likely to address, explicitly, values--to ask not just what study ought to be undertaken but why such study might be important.

CHAPTER 3: THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Perhaps the most striking thing about this campus, as I suggested earlier, was the genuine feeling of an intellectual community. Students and faculty worked together, socialized together, and pursued various enquiries together. It was this that dominated the campus, not schedules or exams or research grants, but people excited about pursuits of the mind, and all sharing in the excitement . . . . to be continued.

> *A College . . . is a group of teachers and pupils, all of whom are reading the same books, trying to solve the same problems.* A. Meiklejohn[1]

Alexander Meiklejohn was a pioneer of educational reform in the 1920's and 30's. In the above quotation he was, in part, referring to curriculum, but beyond that to the idea of an intellectual community, where students and faculty are all engaged, together, in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. This to Meiklejohn was central--we must read some of the same books in order to talk to each other about ideas and to grapple with important concepts and to discuss and debate, as a community of learners.

Meiklejohn would not be pleased with the direction that most of our colleges and universities (in the United States and in Canada) have taken since his efforts, earlier this century, to counter the growing force of specialization and research. For all of the positive aspects of our current emphasis upon disciplines and primary research in those disciplines, we surely have lost a great deal in regard to the general learning environment for our students.

In Chapter 2 some of the advantages and disadvantages of discipline-based curriculum, compared with more integrated models of undergraduate education, were reviewed. The advantages of traditional discipline-based education are not to be underestimated, for it provides a widely-recognized, substantive approach to undergraduate learning, and it provides ready access to further study. But the costs in terms of the overall educational experience for our students are undeniable as well. While not an inevitable consequence of traditional programs, a frequent result is fragmentation of the curriculum, a general failure to provide connections between disciplines, isolation of students, and an inadequate intellectual engagement with peers and with faculty. These are serious omissions in the experiences of most undergraduates.

Consider the nature of our undergraduate programs and compare them with Meiklejohn's vision and its implications in regard to creating communities of learners. The curriculum in modern universities is divided into an enormous number of courses, most of which (particularly at the higher levels) are under the full control of individual instructors, within certain general expectations of the community of scholars in that discipline. Instructors will be expected to deal with certain ideas in certain courses, but

the approach to doing so is, usually, entirely at the individual discretion of that instructor. Unfortunately this individual autonomy frequently leads to a fragmented overall curriculum; it leaves students finding little in common in moving from one course to another, it leaves faculty accountable to no one except students who are usually too inexperienced to challenge seriously the instructors's intellectual authority. The traditional instructor's role is that of sole authority teaching a group of relatively passive students, although many good instructors, of course, try to alleviate these problems, where class sizes permit. But there is relatively little done to encourage collaboration and the working toward improved learning environments. The system does not place a high value on such improvements, and there is little recognition or reward for those who do.

STAND-ALONE COURSES VERSUS COLLABORATIVE TEACHING

An almost universal feature of modern universities is the existence of stand-alone courses. The standard load for full-time students is five such courses, and in most instances all of these courses are taught by different instructors, and most will have different students. There is little sense of continuity between courses, and little attempt is made, in most instances, to develop any consistency or interrelationship between courses, even in the same discipline. This affects learning in a number of very serious ways, but perhaps most seriously in the loss of any sense of community: rather than being part of a common intellectual pursuit students go from class to class, often seeing an entirely different group of students, studying material which is not (by the instructor or in any other way) shown to have any relationship to that in other courses the student is taking. Often the perspective or approach of one instructor will be radically different from that of another. This may in itself perhaps have the effect of demonstrating a healthy diversity of opinion, except that the views are rarely reviewed or reconciled, or explicitly compared or debated. Neither the instructor nor the students act as part of a common learning community, such is the emphasis upon individual scholarly independence.

Stand-alone courses have advantages as well. They represent commonly-accepted currency in the academic world. Most courses are readily identifiable, and if one institution does not offer a particular course it is likely to be familiar with that course and may transfer credit, where appropriate. Instructors can move from institution to institution throughout Canada and the United States, and easily teach at any of them. Credits are also easily attached to standard courses, and are readily understood and dealt with. Individual teaching is also much easier than collaborative teaching, for one has only to answer directly to oneself and one's students, not one's peers. And, perhaps most importantly, stand-alone courses allow for the full richness of expression of creative individuality when courses are taught by great instructors.

Moving away from traditional course structures, then, has advantages and disadvantages. Certainly collaborative teaching will create more work, and in that limited sense is less efficient. However, there is strong evidence of a very beneficial impact upon students.

THE BUILDING OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The building of learning communities may be the clearest way learning can be improved in our colleges and universities. The general idea is that instructors collaborate in their teaching, and that the structure of programming is set up so that students can share more of their learning experience with other students. There is strong evidence to suggest that any serious attempt to accomplish these things will result in an improved learning experience for students.[2]

Alexander Astin reports on a very extensive national study carried out in the United States, where the success of programs of general education was reviewed at over 100 American institutions.[3] Astin concluded that by far the most significant way in which these programs can be strengthened is by improving student-student interaction. The second most important way is by improving student-teacher interaction. These, of course, are complex matters requiring sophisticated interpretation, and with much room for error, but the results do seem to provide some evidence for that which many have suspected, and have observed in other college and university contexts, that an environment which encourages students to work together, and which builds the relationships between students and faculty, will improve the undergraduate experience.

A number of recent studies have investigated social influences on learning. The academic success of Indochinese refugee children in the United States, for example, was attributed to supportive family environments. Whereas family size has previously been regarded as a reliable prediction of low achievement, the Indochinese children from larger families did even better than those from smaller families. This was thought to be the result of brothers and sisters working together in learning, with the younger learning from the older, and the older learning through teaching.[4]

The purpose of learning communities is, in part, to try to create positive and supportive learning environments such as those the Indochinese refugee children have in their homes. In discussing attrition in Chapter 1 reference was made to importance of "academic and social involvement" in retaining students. Learning communities will enhance such involvement by engaging students and faculty in a mutually supportive intellectual enquiry in which the goal, for all, is learning.

There are many ways to build learning communities, and a number of them have been detailed in a booklet written by Barbara Smith, Dean of Curriculum at The Evergreen State College. Evergreen itself is developed entirely upon an integrated learning community model of teaching, and the Centre for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education which grew out of the College now spearheads a strong movement in Washington State to develop learning communities in other institutions. Many universities and colleges in the United States have adopted some of these techniques, and the reports of success have been impressive.[5] Learning communities provide richer learning experiences in more supportive environments, and lead to reduced rates of attrition.

Some models for learning communities are as follows:

1. The "Freshman Interest Group", or FIG, which in different ways tries to divide the freshman class up into smaller groups so they get to know each other and make friends. Sometimes courses will be tied together by a common seminar.

2. FIG groups which contain students in similar programs and which stay together throughout the year and perhaps through second, third and fourth years, with parallel classes of relatively small size and a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary seminar work.

3. Fully integrated core programs (as discussed in Chapter 2) are the most effective forms of learning communities. Models can be found at Evergreen, and Arts I at the University of British Columbia, and Liberal Studies at Malaspina College, and in its most fully developed form at St. John's Colleges in Santa Fe and Annapolis. Groups of students and faculty work intensively together over an extended period on a common academic curriculum in a space set aside for that activity. This approach works particularly well for a variety of reasons, including the fact that everyone is dealing with the same work at the same time, without fragmentation into unconnected blocks.

Learning communities can improve teaching in existing institutions, with existing program structures, and no loss of discipline integrity, or they can be used to create entirely new program structures, with very distinct learning advantages. Learning communities need not be expensive alternatives. Some versions may entail no extra cost (although some extra faculty work will be inevitable), while others can be employed at a modest increase in costs. Much rhetoric is expended on concerns about teaching, and we spend an enormous amount of money on higher education. The possibility of slightly increased costs, then, should not deter us, if it means we can do the job better. But even if cost is an overriding factor, it is still possible to have some of the benefits of learning communities.

NOTES:

1. Meiklejohn, Alexander. The Experimental College. Edited and Abridged by John Walker Powell. Seven Locks Press, Inc., 1981. 49.

2. See Faith Gabelnick, Jean MacGregor, Roberta S. Matthews, Barbara Leigh Smith, Learning Communities: Creating Connections Among Students, Faculty, and Disciplines, New Directions for Teaching an Learning No. 41, Spring 1990 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

3. Astin, Alexander. Presentation at the Thirty-First Annual Conference of the Association for General and Liberal Studies, October 16 - 19, 1991, Bellevue/Seattle, Washington.

4. Caplan, N, Choy, M.H., and Whitmore, J.K. "Indochinese Refugee Families and Academic Achievement." Scientific American. February 1992: 36-42.

5. See reference 2 (Gabelnick et al) and the important study by V. Tinto, Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

CHAPTER 4: THE FACULTY

The faculty at this campus were different. Their concerns were less focused upon their work as individuals in their discipline, and more focused upon how they interacted with their colleagues and their students, as part of a community. This shift in focus had remarkable and far-reaching consequences. The concerns of the largest segment of the community, the undergraduates, became central. Faculty could not conceive of being satisfied in their work unless this overriding responsibility of educating undergraduates was, somehow, successfully addressed. Research was part of the work of many of those faculty, but it was not their first or primary concern. And the research in which they participated was designed not just to produce publications but, most importantly, to stimulate interest in their students. Research was a fully integrated part of the teaching process, not an end in itself. The institution was not likely to produce any Nobel Prize winning research, but it was not likely to do so anyway, whatever it did. Faculty were less interested in seeking a position of prominence in the international community of scholars than in using their research to complement, inform, and stimulate their students.

How had this change in emphasis, and change in attitude of faculty been accomplished? At some point choices had been made to steer a different course. Faculty were hired, evaluated, and promoted primarily on the basis of teaching and on their ability to work collaboratively with their colleagues. From their first interview they understood that this institution was different, and this difference was reinforced at every opportunity . . . . to be continued.

The complex issue of research and teaching is central to the matter of undergraduate education. To help clarify subsequent arguments, following is a summary of the relevant positions taken in this paper in regard to the relationship between teaching and research.

1. Original research, and the publishing of that research, is central to the pursuit of graduate studies in our universities; it is not central to most undergraduate education.

2. It is important for all faculty in colleges and universities to engage in some form of professional or scholarly activity in order to keep up-to-date in their disciplines and to keep their minds active. This activity may or may not involve original research. The Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada formulated a useful and broader definition of research:

> *Research is interpreted broadly to include reflective inquiry and scholarly, empirical investigations, critical analysis and in-house studies for organizational use. It may be oriented to theory building, problem solving, policy formulation, or planning.*[1]

In recent years a form of research which is more closely identified with teaching and learning has been described. Called "classroom research" it refers to a process of "systematic and insightful observation about how students learn" and has the dual benefit of intellectual stimulation and the provision of useful information for teaching.[2]

3. Faculty engaged in programs of original research may or may not be more inspired teachers of undergraduates; in some cases the stimulation and excitement of conducting research may significantly enliven an instructor's undergraduate classes. It is also possible that involvement in research may distract an instructor from the needs of undergraduates. There is no existing evidence that proves that involvement in original research per se has or has not a significant impact on undergraduate teaching.[3]

4. It is reasonable to assume that good undergraduate instruction requires teachers who are interested in providing such instruction. The problem in our universities is that success in research provides not only the abstract satisfaction of high-level intellectual achievement, with the concomitant pride of making an original contribution to scholarship, but it also provides very concrete rewards: financial security and personal prestige and success. Effort put into teaching, on the other hand, provides some abstract rewards, but few concrete ones.

5. Teaching and original research are sometimes deemed to be inseparable: one requires the other. For much of the undergraduate experience this is simply not the case. There are excellent university teachers who do little or no research, and there are excellent researchers who are hopeless teachers. It does, on the other hand, seem reasonable to assume that an active mind is necessary for a good teacher (as in point 2 above). Original research may demonstrate an active mind, but it is not a requirement for such a mind.[3]

Further to these points, it is not difficult to conclude that teaching is undervalued in our universities, and an emphasis on research is largely responsible for that undervaluation. Central to any correction of this problem are the faculty who carry out the teaching. Essentially we must find ways of encouraging greater faculty interest in teaching, as a counter to their current dominant interest in research. Some of these ways are listed below. Most are discussed by Stuart Smith and others, so extensive discussion will not be attempted here.

PROMOTION

Much has been written about the fact that research and publication are the main criteria used to determine promotions in most universities. Often claims are made about the importance of teaching in assessing candidates for promotion, but the realities are frequently otherwise.

Institutions that rank assistant, associate, and full professors need to find ways of including teaching as a significant component of assessment for promotion. Anything less will ensure that research continues to be the main topic of interest to faculty seeking promotion.

In institutions where no system of promotion has been established, serious consideration should be given to having no ranking system. At a superficial level, at least, research is much more readily and easily evaluated than teaching. Pages of published material are easy to count.[4] Any system of promotion, therefore, will inevitably lead to overdependence upon the more easily measurable set of criteria.[5] There are many good intentions expressed in regard to this issue. The problem arises when actual determinations of merit are made, by faculty faced with uncertain and dubious information on teaching on one hand, and clear and apparently unambiguous records of publication success on the other. Teaching dossiers or other approaches to assessing teaching may help with this problem, but the very existence of a system of promotions creates an on-going tension which will not work in favour of improved teaching.

EVALUATION

This, of course, is the critical problem in basing promotion and tenure on teaching ability. How is one to determine teaching effectiveness? There has been an enormous amount written on this topic and no attempt will be made here to reconstruct any of these arguments. Some reasonable method must be chosen, if teaching is going to be of central importance in an institution, and that method must be pursued in a serious and consistent manner. The Teaching Dossier (or Faculty Portfolio) approach[6] also mentioned by Stuart Smith, suggests an approach to be considered for both new and existing institutions. Establishing such an approach from the start of a new institution would surely have a significant and long-term impact on the way in which teaching is viewed in that institution. This approach incorporates all ways in which teaching might be shown to be effective, and keeps a record of such accomplishment in a format which helps to demonstrate a record of achievement.

Something additional should be said about the relative ease of evaluating teaching and research. As suggested earlier, it is only a very superficial evaluation of research that is easier to accomplish than evaluation of teaching. One can count pages which have been approved by referees for publication in journals, but the evaluation of the importance of such work, or the originality or even the effort required is virtually impossible to evaluate. There is important work, to be sure, but there is much that is mundane and more likely to distract from rather than to inspire good teaching. Some such work might make a minor contribution to the accumulation of knowledge in the world, but how is such a thing to be evaluated, realistically, by an evaluation committee? The almost irresistible tendency is to rely upon pages in refereed journals, leaving the judgement of referees to validate the significance of the work. But the referees as well as the writers have a vested interest in continued activity in the area in question, regardless of how abstruse or irrelevant to human society. That is not to say that relevance must be held as a criterion for research, but it is entirely possible for an area of enquiry to be kept alive for dubious reasons. Compared to this complex set of problems, the evaluation of teaching seems almost trivial. Effective teachers are well-known in every institution, and ways of formally determining this are well-established. Let us abandon, then, the simplistic and erroneous idea that research is more easily evaluated than teaching.

RECRUITMENT OF FACULTY

It is crucial that faculty are recruited for the particular kind of programs to be taught, rather than simply recruited on the basis of their credentials and experience. This applies both to traditional discipline-based and to alternative programs. In the former case departments must, if they are to perform their teaching function in a responsible manner, find faculty who can teach discipline-based courses in an effective manner. In the latter case faculty who can teach effectively in the alternative environments must be found. Moreover, it must be made clear to any faculty who are hired that differences exist between what will be expected of them and what would be expected in a more traditional institution. Faculty bring expectations with them, and in the absence of strong indications otherwise they will expect a traditional university environment. It will be difficult for alternatives to succeed if faculty expect something else.

TRAINING IN TEACHING

There are probably few subjects as likely to upset academic faculty as the idea of training in teaching. There are a number of reasons for this. In part it is because much work in this area is of dubious value. There is also deep suspicion of motives. Do faculties of education want to secure this territory as well, and impose required training

programs on university faculty? Do administrators think that teacher certification program will improve college and university teaching?

There may indeed be problems with programs to train faculty to teach, but surely the idea of learning about teaching cannot be a bad one. But the rejection is not of particular programs but of all programs, and of the idea of such programs, even voluntary ones. The reasons for this attitude may not be entirely rational, and one scarcely dares even to try to address the issue, for fear of discrediting the rest of one's work.

Some idea of the intensity of feelings for this topic may be gained from the fact that only two universities in Canada (Victoria and McGill) offer credit courses in teaching for their graduate students. Yet, the one common experience virtually all will have in their future is teaching.

There are, of course, some things we can learn about teaching. Everyone who teaches goes through a learning process. Can some of this learning be translated into courses or workshops? It seems clear that some such courses and workshops do help some faculty. If such courses and workshops are approached with modest expectations, in an entirely non-threatening manner, they might be accepted by some faculty.

The instructional workshops that have been offered in many colleges, for example, have been exemplary in being voluntary and effective. Faculty have found them to be helpful and supportive, and a worthwhile activity.[7]

NOTES:

1. Sheffield, Edward. Research on Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, May 1982.

2. Cross, K. Patricia. "Classroom Research: Helping Professors Learn More About Teaching and Learning." How Administrators Can Improve Teaching. P. Seldin and Associates. San Francisco, Oxford: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

3. For a recent discussion of and a review of the research into this contentious issue see Ian Johnston, "Myth Conceptions of Academic Work," Canadian Journal of Higher Education (Winter 1991).

4. Students, of course, are easy to count as well--numbers of students processed through a course. But this is never taken seriously in the academic community as a measure of teaching

accomplishment, although it seems likely to be at least as relevant as page counts.

5. The fact that the quantity of research publications may not be the best guide to the quality of the research is one of the issues whose consequences are explored by Jaroslav Pelikan in Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. Ernest L. Boyer. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: Princeton, New Jersey, 1990. 67.

6. Shore, Bruce M. et al. The CAUT Guide To The Teaching Dossier: Its Preparation and Use. Canadian Association of University Teachers (revised, 1986; reprinted, 1991).

Seldin, Peter. The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide To Improved Performance And Promotion/Tenure Decisions. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 1991.

7. At the same time, however, it is clear that university professors display a continuing reluctance to participate in special programmes which address themselves to improving the quality of instruction. See, for example, Elizabeth S. Botman, and Alexander D. Gregor, "Faculty Participation in Teaching Improvement Programs" The Canadian Journal of Higher Education 14.2 (1984): 63-73.

CHAPTER 5: CHOICES FOR INSTITUTIONS

How did this institution get to be this way? It might have been because faculty, and decision-making bodies, and administrators all decided that their institution had the choice of being a second or third rate traditional research-oriented university, or a first rate teaching university. Once they did started to think about it, the choice would not have been at all difficult. Competition in the world of research is considerable; one can get work published but the work which is really considered to be significant is usually estimated at less than 5%. And most of this is done through large, well-funded, research programs, usually in larger universities. Competition in teaching excellence, however, is minimal. The establishment of a reputation for true excellence in this area, if an institution were dedicated to this single purpose, would not at all be difficult. The talent that exists in every college and university in the country means that every one of them could choose teaching excellence. The only catch, and it is a big one, is the one suggested by Stuart Smith: "nothing less than a total recommitment to it is required". . . . to be continued.

There are essentially three ways that alternative approaches to undergraduate education can be introduced into our institutions.

1) Individual Faculty

Faculty members have a considerable degree of autonomy in teaching their courses. They can simply concentrate on teaching their discipline, working entirely on their own, unimpeded by the presence or involvement of their colleagues in the courses they teach. On the other hand, faculty could seek to broaden the perspectives of students by, for example, exploring how work in the discipline relates to work in other fields, and how a full understanding of many complex issues requires examination from different points of view. Faculty could also choose to work with one or more colleagues to provide students with the advantages of collaborative teaching. In this way faculty could create a learning environment which is less fragmented and more conducive to collaborative learning.

Such alternative choices require that more time and effort be put into teaching, which will distract from research and may jeopardize faculty's chances for promotion. Still, a commitment to teaching offers different rewards. In a material sense "there is no pay-off," to use the words of a faculty member quoted in the Smith Commission of Inquiry,[1] but there are less tangible benefits that many faculty find worth the price. The satisfaction that comes from seeing students begin to understand complex ideas, for example, is a pay-off that all good teachers have experienced.

A compelling case for an alternative approach to undergraduate education at U.B.C. was made in 1965 by a group of five faculty commissioned to explore the

issue. The report, entitled "Discipline and Discovery" argues that the only effective means of addressing issues of importance in the freshman year is by introducing a common, integrated core program.[2] Like many such reports it appears not to have had much impact on the university as a whole, although individual faculty may have benefitted from some of the ideas.

2) Institutional Decision-Making Bodies

i) Departments and Faculties

These bodies can affect the emphasis put on teaching, and encourage exploration of teaching-related alternatives. For example, the requirements for a particular degree could be changed to include a strong program of general education. Regulations for hiring, assessment, and promotion could be redesigned to encourage teaching. Collaborative work between instructors could be encouraged by introducing programs such as "writing across the curriculum."

ii) Boards and Senates

The authority of college boards is currently very different from that of university boards, where authority is shared with the Senate. College boards have final authority over most college matters, and they therefore can have a considerable influence over the direction taken by their institutions. In universities senates have authority over academic matters. They can influence the direction of an institution in regard to teaching alternatives. More often they only react to proposals from departments and faculty.

iii) Administration

Again the situation in colleges is different from that in universities. In both cases, however, the scope for administrative leadership is usually considered to be quite limited. Clark Kerr, on the other hand, argues that administrators do have the ability to bring about change:

> *The only persons who might, if they wished, encourage the professors [to think creatively and responsibly about what a comprehensive and coherent college education ought to be] are the presidents, the provosts, and the deans. The professors must give their "advice and consent"*

> *but they will not, with few exceptions, take the initiative. Professors do have the power; but if anything is going to be done about the deterioration of general education, the academic administrators must take the initiative with respect to a proper role for liberal learning and basic skill training, and then appeal to the professors.*[3]

Some argue that the inability, or unwillingness, of administrators to lead in the management of academic affairs means that an important counterbalance to faculty-oriented decision-making is lost.[4] Others argue that this is not necessary, and that faculty should control all aspects of academic governance. If this latter view prevails, and the new degree-granting institutions in B.C. adopt the existing university governance structure, then administrators may not have much impact upon the directions taken by these institutions.

3) Mandates Determined by the Province

Through legislation or ministry directive it is possible for new and different mandates to be given to some institutions. It may even be the case that such action is necessary before we find significant movement to alternatives. This is an important matter; the next chapter, therefore, is devoted to this topic.

However, a mandate from the Ministry in itself will be insufficient. Also required is institutional cooperation. If steps are not taken in individual institutions to support a public initiative, then certain serious conflicts are likely to arise. It is important that, along with the development of public policy, extensive discussion take place with the institutions to be affected.

COMMENTS ON CAREER, TECHNOLOGY AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Related to a number of issues discussed in this paper is the question of inclusion of general education requirements in career, technology, and vocational programs. Typically in British Columbia we find some such courses offered as part of career and technology programs--English, for example, and often some others. Vocational programs, on the other hand, rarely include any component beyond the skills and knowledge directly related to the specific training being provided. Moreover, in many career and technology programs, there is usually pressure to add "relevant" components and to remove "irrelevant" elements. Many English courses, for example, simply become

technical writing courses, rather than liberal arts courses. On the other hand, some jurisdictions (California, for example) do require a general education component in all programs, including vocational programs.

The problem for technology and vocational programs is similar to that for students in discipline-based degree programs, except that it is worse. Proponents of discipline-based degrees can argue, with some justification, that their curricula do include some general education. Technology and vocational programs are much more specialized and generally offer little in the way of general education.

Many of those involved in offering career, technology, and vocational programs discount the importance of any broadening components. The arguments are similar to those for specialization in degree programs, though more extreme. The purpose of these programs is often seen to be preparation for employment, in a very narrow sense, and anything else is considered as a distraction and a dilution. But a strong case can be made that it is the responsibility of colleges to provide some general education to all students who go there, at least, to the extent that all students develop some minimal competence in general intellectual skills. To suggest that this is irrelevant to any but those seeking degrees is to profess either a deeply elitist view of education, or to discount the value of general education.

It seems reasonable to suggest that, as with discipline-based programs, at least some alternative approaches to career, technology, and vocational programs should be available. While some programs might remain highly specialized others might experiment with requirements for general education. Such a development offers a number of creative opportunities for colleges to explore integrating liberal arts or the fine and performing arts into the curriculum. Interesting collaborations between career, technical, vocational, and arts instructors could be developed.

The decision made many years ago to integrate colleges and vocational institutes in B.C. provided an opportunity to develop a more integrated approach to job-oriented programs. Now, with the emergence of degree-programs in colleges, the possibility of incorporating some technology and vocational skills into degree programs is also becoming a real possibility.[5]

The introduction of degree programs in colleges has often been seen as a real threat to the comprehensive nature of community colleges in B.C.[6] It can also be a real opportunity for the enrichment of degree programs and career, technology, and vocational programs, if instead of continuing to operate in separate and competing worlds, faculty see the new developments as such an opportunity.

A FURTHER COMMENT ON REPUTATION

Many of those studying undergraduate education are uneasy about entering into debate on content of undergraduate programs, preferring instead to discuss methodologies. Gamson is typical:

> *At a time when bitter disputes were raging around the country about Western and non-Western studies and the nature of the literary canon, they [a task force of scholars seeking to draw up principles of undergraduate education] wanted to underline the emphasis of the principles on the <u>how</u> rather than the <u>what</u> of effective undergraduate education.*[7]

This position is understandable, given that many of these disputes are centered in discipline-oriented disagreements; how can scholars from other fields presume to take a position on essentially a discipline-based dispute? On the other hand there are several arguments which sometimes rise above the morass that specialists in particular disciplines sometimes create. John Searle, for example, has written some very clear statements on the necessary conditions for being a well-educated person;[8] such statements should be kept in mind when designing programs of general education and of alternatives in general:

> *. . . I think we are not doing a good job in general education. Faced with the well-known cafeteria of courses, and obliged to fill very few requirements, a student is more likely to be well educated as the result of chance, or of his or her determination, than as a consequence of planning by the university authorities. Why do we lack the confidence to require that each undergraduate acquire the rudiments of a good general education?*
>
> *. . . First, the student should have enough knowledge of his or her cultural tradition to know how it got to be the way it is. This involves both political and social history, on the one hand, as well as the mastery of some of the great philosophical and literary texts of the culture on the other. It involves reading not only texts that are of great value, like those of Plato, but many less valuable that have been influential, such as the works of Marx . . . .*
>
> *. . . Second, you need to know enough of the natural sciences so that you are not a stranger in the world . . . .*
>
> *. . . Third, you need to know enough about how society works so that you understand what a trade cycle is, or how interest rates will affect the value of the currency, for example . . . .*

> *. . . Fourth, you need to know at least one foreign language well enough so that you can read the best literature that that language has produced in the original, and so you carry on a reasonable conversation and have dreams in that language . . . .*
>
> *. . . Fifth, you need to know enough philosophy so that the methods of logical analysis are available to you to be used as a tool. One of the most depressing things about educated people today is that so few of them, even among professional intellectuals, are able to follow the steps of a simple logical argument.*
>
> *Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you need to acquire the skills of writing and speaking that make for candor, rigor, and clarity. You cannot think clearly if you cannot speak and write clearly . . . .*
>
> *. . . if the manner of instruction is adequate, the student should be able to acquire this much knowledge in a way that combines intellectual openness, critical scrutiny, and logical clarity. If so, learning will not stop when the student leaves the university. None of the books I have been reading about higher education makes even these elementary points.*

If some good sense does not prevail in the development of alternative programs then more harm than good will have been done. If in abandoning the restrictions of discipline requirements, for example, we lose all sense of standards and intellectual rigor, then our students will have been done a disservice. The bitterness of the current dispute on these matters is indeed intimidating, but it cannot be avoided. "How" we teach is not very important if "what" we teach does not engage and enrich the human mind and spirit.

Those who develop alternative programs, especially non-disciplinary or integrated core programs, must be alert to these problems of content, and be prepared to fight to maintain the integrity of their programs. In programs which maintain disciplines at their core there is some structural protection against the removal of substantive content, but in non-disciplinary programs the protection is less, and the threat greater. In such cases it is important to have some mechanism to protect content, some framework which limits the potential retreat for standards. At Malaspina College that framework includes a rough chronological requirement, starting with the Greeks, so that earnest zealots who believe that all significant human writing occurred in the twentieth century can be limited in their influence. Conversely, the final semester of the Malaspina program is devoted to contemporary works. There is a general requirement that most readings are primary sources, and that they are significant ones, so that students must engage with great minds wrestling with great issues. Such measures do not ensure program quality or credibility,

but some such measures, in these troubled and confused times, may be necessary for quality and credibility.

NOTES:

1. Stuart L. Smith. Report: Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa, 1991. 39.

2. Eliot, C.W.J. et al. Discipline and Discovery: A Proposal To The Faculty Of Arts Of The University of British Columbia. Vancouver, B.C.: The Vancouver Stationers Ltd., 1965.

3. Kerr, Clark. The Great Transformation in Higher Education: 1960-1980. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press 1991. 300.

4. See, for example, R. Birnbaum. Faculty in Governance: The Role of Senates and Joint Committees in Academic Decision Making. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1991.

5. Some colleges in British Columbia (Fraser Valley College in particular) are exploring the development of degrees consisting of two years of a career or technology program and two years of academic study.

6. Dennison, J. The University-College Idea: A Critical Analysis. Canadian Journal of Higher Education, in press.

7. Z. F. Gamson. Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. A.N. Chickering and Z.F. Gamson, Ed. Jossey-Boss, Inc. (1991). 7.

8. John Searle. "The Storm Over the University." The New York Review of Books. (Dec. 1990). 34-42.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

What else led to the creation of this alternative institution? It required a legislated mandate. There are strong reasons why a serious commitment to alternatives is unlikely, without a specific directive from government to do so. As Stuart Smith says, "the forces at play are simply too powerful and even the best efforts of well meaning administrators are unlikely to make much difference." The reasons for avoiding alternatives will be aggressively articulated and forcefully defended. The reason for considering alternatives will have relatively few advocates. But the reason itself is sufficient: we can do better for many of our students.

The Province of British Columbia will be developing new legislation to accommodate various new degree-granting institutions in British Columbia, including the "university-colleges," and possibly BCIT and the Emily Carr College of Art and Design. There is also the possibility of including new universities in the new or revised legislation. In this process there could well be some differentiation: BCIT, for example, will likely have a legislated mandate different from institutions with academic arts and science degree programs. It is possible that the differentiation could extend to mandates granted for academic arts and science programs as well. Some of the possible alternative mandates are discussed below, followed by a discussion of cost alternatives. Finally, a broader interpretation of "access" is included, as well as a discussion of the issue of institutional autonomy and public policy.

CREATING A DIFFERENT MANDATE

1. Research and Teaching Institutions

The State of California has created a three-tiered system of post-secondary institutions:

i) The University of California System, consisting of institutions with a research emphasis granting PhD's, and receiving the highest operating funds in the system.

ii) The State University system, consisting of institutions ostensibly dedicated to teaching, allowed to grant Master's degrees, but not PhD's, receiving an intermediate level of operating funds.

iii) The Junior College system, offering two years of university work, receiving the lowest level of operating funds.

While the levels of funding for the different institutions in California might be questionable, seeming to place considerably greater value on research than teaching, the

idea of having different roles for different academic institutions may have considerable merit.

There are good reasons for differentiation. The dominance of primary research in the academic community--it is the currency of value in regard to academic respect, as well as promotion and job security--ensures that faculty who themselves are products of the system will be strongly inclined to place a similarly high value on research. This is a natural and in some ways desirable tendency of faculty, as they strive for success and recognition in international communities of scholars in particular disciplines. But it is because of this strong influence of these international communities that our institutions, or our Provincial system of institutions, must provide some protection against overemphasis of research and the consequent undervaluation of teaching.

At the same time, of course, it is important that B.C. scholars have status within the international community of scholars. A system which provides both for research-centred and teaching-centred institutions, by Provincial mandate, might well prove the best overall approach for British Columbia.

A word of caution should be added here. The problem is not resolved simply by stating that some institutions will have a research mandate, and that others will be primarily dedicated to teaching. Even in California a tendency for the State institutions to become more like the research universities is becoming evident. The restriction on offering PhD's, for example, is being bypassed by the forming of partnerships between the two levels of institutions. The mandate, then, for teaching institutions may well need to be extensive and specific, perhaps exceeding normal terms of such a mandate. A considerable amount of research into the nature of such mandates elsewhere needs to be undertaken.

Partnerships could be a desirable feature of the system if, for example, faculty had access to different institutions with different opportunities. Periodically, then, some faculty in teaching institutions might spend time in research institutions, and vice versa. But if the partnerships are simply used to bypass the differentiated role for institutions, then such arrangements would not be desirable. The point of differentiation is to make clear the different roles and expectations of the different institutions. The teaching institutions should focus upon excellence in teaching, and not perpetually aspire to research status.

A further advantage to a differentiated system is that our intellectual resources can be better utilized. British Columbia simply will not be able to support many first rank research institutions that can compete on an equal footing in the community of scholars. If we encourage all of our degree-granting institutions to aspire to a research focus, most of these institutions will come to be seen as third-rate at best, as the

supporting resources and research capabilities of all institutions will not all be to an international standard. On the other hand, by having a differentiated system some institutions could focus on excellence in research, and some in teaching, so that the abilities of faculty would be best utilized, and research resources could be concentrated.

2. Special Mandates for Particular Institutions

An extraordinary experiment in post-secondary education has been taking place since 1967, when The Evergreen State College[1] was introduced into the post-secondary system in the state of Washington. Administrators and a group of faculty were hired to create a new college. Their mandate was to establish a college that was different from other State colleges; it was left to the administrators and faculty to define how it would be different.

In seeking alternative approaches to undergraduate education one member of the group told the others about his friendship with philosophers Alexander Meiklejohn and Joseph Tussman, both of whom had started experimental programs elsewhere. The result was the adoption of a radically different structure for undergraduate programs: the entire curriculum consists of team-taught, theme-based programs based on the Meiklejohn-Tussman approach. There are no discipline-based courses nor discipline-based departments. The resulting curriculum is unlike that of any other state-supported institution in the United States, and Evergreen has become a phenomenon of interest around the world.

The vision of those involved in creating an alternative degree-granting institution in Washington has generated much thought about post-secondary education and has lead to the investment of much talent and energy into the creation of innovative programs at Evergreen, programs which by all accounts have provided stimulating and valuable undergraduate experiences for their students. The impact of this experiment, however, has gone well beyond Evergreen itself. Evergreen houses the Institute for the Improvement of Undergraduate Teaching, which has become a leading force in educational reform throughout the United States. Over thirty post-secondary institutions in Washington have used some of the ideas generated by Evergreen and the Institute. The movement nurtured at Evergreen now influences many educational thinkers and planners.

The lesson in this for British Columbia is that a decision by legislators can have a profound impact upon the education of our students, and that the choices available to legislators are not simply choices of location and funding, but choices which can deeply affect the very nature of the institutions and the quality of our students' undergraduate experience.

3. A Network of Alternative Institutions

The emergence of degree-granting colleges in British Columbia has given us an unusual opportunity to develop a network of smaller institutions offering alternative approaches to degree programs, each of which could be designed to take advantage of particular college strengths, each of which could use its own creative resources to develop innovative programs. These institutions, focusing on undergraduate teaching, could offer a rich variety of new undergraduate possibilities. The universities could then continue to emphasize research, where size is an advantage, and support for research could be concentrated in these institutions. Such an approach would be relatively efficient as well as providing greater range of choices for students in the Province with a differentiated system of smaller, specialized degree-granting institutions. Chapter 7 explores this idea in more detail.

THE ISSUE OF FUNDING

It should be pointed out that there are some significant long range cost advantages of a differentiated system embracing some alternative programming and stressing teaching and core programs, and deemphasizing specialization and research.

This could occur in at least three distinct ways:

i) Teaching Assignments

Such assignments can be higher for faculty when they are not expected to engaged in primary research. That is not to say that faculty who do engage in significant research projects might not be given some workload assistance in conducting such research, but in a teaching-based institution such assistance could be given selectively, with a normal expectation for a greater emphasis on teaching.

ii) Proliferation of Courses

Curricula developed for the purpose of general education can have many common elements for all students. Courses developed to serve a discipline-based curriculum will have few elements in common, and especially at the upper-level will often represent highly specialized areas of study. Course proliferation in such a circumstance is inevitable. Proliferation is costly because more course preparation is required, and because some courses are likely to have lower enrolments. Requiring particular courses for a

program, or requiring an integrated core, decreases the potential for unnecessary proliferation.

iii) Resources

Any research-oriented course requires the support of expensive research facilities. If students are going to learn about how to approach fundamental research in scientific disciplines they must have access to expensive equipment, and they must have space in which to conduct research. In virtually all disciplines students must have access to extensive computer resources, and they must have access to extensive special-purpose research libraries, which contain periodicals and books in all of the specialized subject areas being covered in courses. The library requirements alone are a very expensive proposition for any discipline-based program, both to establish and to maintain. The fewer the number of specialized courses offered, the less the equipment and library needs. The argument here should not be taken to mean that library needs are not important for alternative programs, for they are. But their needs are less than the needs of maximized research-oriented programs, with the great number of specialized books and periodicals that are needed for adequate coverage of every specialized area which is pursued in any course. None of the discussion here should be taken as a reason for not creating new institutions with a research focus, because such institutions might well be needed. It should, however, be taken as a reason to consider alternative choices, in some locations, particularly by legislators who have the responsibility of making the most efficient use of existing funding.

ACCESS AND ALTERNATIVES

It can be argued that it is important for students in all regions of the Province to have access to traditional, discipline-based programs, which are the best known and which we can expect to be in the greatest demand. This assessment could be challenged, on the basis of arguments made in this report and elsewhere, but the case is at least arguable. But where traditional programs are already within relatively easy reach, access may be served better not by simply providing more of the same kinds of programs, but by providing alternative programs.

Proximity to existing university programs, then, would be used to determine where mandates for alternative programs could best be considered. Where universities already exist, the possibility of alternative degree-completion programs, with some of the educational advantages described above, and with lower costs, could well be considered

for a number of colleges. Many such colleges are well situated to develop imaginative degree alternatives, with some of the educationally desirable features described earlier in this report. Colleges have a teaching/learning orientation, many of the faculty have broader and less specialized interests, and the faculty have less commitment to research and specialization. These colleges may well be suitable institutions for the development of innovative undergraduate alternatives.

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY AND PUBLIC POLICY

> *Two requirements are fundamental to the promotion of excellence in British Columbia's higher education. These are first, diversification of opportunity, both in respect to the kinds of educational experience available and the places where it can be obtained. The second requirement is self-government of individual institutions in respect to setting objectives, standards, admissions, selection of staff, curriculum, personnel policies, administrative structure, and all the other things that go to make up the operation of a college.*
>
> John B. Macdonald[2]

John B. Macdonald's 1962 report on higher education in British Columbia became the blueprint for college system in this Province. If we accept Macdonald's views without qualification, then we face a dilemma. If we permit full institutional autonomy then, for reasons discussed earlier in this report, little diversity will exist. Institutions will develop programs on the traditional, discipline-based, research-oriented model of post-secondary education, because that is how credibility is supposedly established, and that is what faculty have been trained to believe is the right way to conduct such education. On the other hand, if we mandate diversity then presumably we threaten the individual institution's autonomy that Macdonald also considered to be so essential for excellence.

Are Macdonald's arguments sound? Certainly a strong case can be made for diversity--all students are not the same, and all their needs and all the needs of society are not the same. Moreover, as argued earlier in this report, there are many valid ways of approaching post-secondary education, and the only way to take full advantage of the talents of our faculty and of the various abilities of students is to make available many of these different approaches.

What of the question of autonomy? Again, it seems clear that the creative energies of faculty and administrators will be most effective when they are allowed to operate with some independence. But there is no such thing as complete independence for a public institution. Whatever system we develop will place significant constraints placed upon institutions--financial constraints, expectations of students and the community, limitations of facilities, to say nothing of the severe problems associated with

gaining support and cooperation within institutions. The idea of unfettered pursuit of ideas in an atmosphere of complete freedom is entirely mythical--no such thing happens on any campus. It is also unrealistic to claim that institutions can be totally free of governmental interference.

R.L. Watts, the former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queens University talks of the "instrumental" view of universities:

> *So there's a public interest in universities, not simply as instruments of national economic development but also as instruments ensuring the transformation of society from an elite society to a mass society, one in which there's an opportunity for people to move out of their circumstances in which they're born.*[3]

The opposite view of universities, Watts argues, is the "autonomist" view, which holds that they ought to stand apart from the immediate concerns of society.[4] Watts argues that a better view is a "mutually interdependent" view:

> *. . . neither universities nor society can be isolated from or independent of each other, for each is dependent on the other; but also that it is important not to look on universities merely as instruments of public policy. To see universities merely as instruments of public policy is to underrate them; to see them as institutions isolated from society is equally to underrate them.*[5]

If we accept Watts' view of interdependence then public policy has a legitimate role to play in determining the direction of universities. A reasonable degree of academic discretion must exist, so that government is not telling faculty how to teach or what to teach. But setting an overall strategy for post-secondary education and a definition of overall missions, guidelines and frameworks for the development of post-secondary institutions can be seen as the responsibility of government. This will neither oppress faculty nor sap their creative energies. In fact, it can release such energies by stimulating creative imagination if new directions are mandated.

Even a public policy so general as the stipulation of "difference," as was the case at The Evergreen State College, can result in profound change. This was in some senses an intrusion into institutional autonomy, but it fostered creativity. The need, then, is for public policy which will provide the necessary encouragement for diversity, yet not be oppressive. That is the task at hand for those responsible for public policy in British Columbia. It is a simple task in that all that is required is to determine a minimal level of prescription that will ensure diversity. It is a very complex task in that there are no rules about precisely what to prescribe, and institutions will tend to resist any prescription

at all. The best resolution of this matter will require wise and courageous decisions by government.

NOTES:

1. Jones, Richard M. Experiment at Evergreen. Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1981.

2. Macdonald, John B. Higher Education in British Columbia and a Plan for The Future. Vancouver, B.C.: The University of British Columbia, 1962. 19.

3. Watts, Ron L. Address from the 1983 Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada to be published in Public Purse, Public Purpose: Accountability and Autonomy in the Groves of Academe. Eds. Cutt, James and Rodney Dobell. Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1992. Manuscript copy. 5.

4. Watts, Ron L., 6.

5. Watts, Ron L., 9.

CHAPTER 7: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

One possible direction for the future of our post-secondary education system in British Columbia is that the universities will continue to grow and university-colleges will grow into small universities and will continue to expand, so that more students in more parts of the Province will have direct access to traditional university education. Such a vision accommodates students simply by providing more spaces, in more convenient locations.

But we have, now, in this Province an opportunity to pursue a vision for post-secondary education which would not merely provide more spaces for students but different kinds of spaces, a vision which would accommodate not only greater numbers of students but a greater range of needs of students, by more effectively serving their individual interests. This vision is of a decentralized system consisting of a few large universities with research mandates, and a larger number of degree-granting university-colleges, all of which have a teaching mandate, and all of which pursue locally-developed but alternative approaches to undergraduate education. These institutions would be charged with seeking excellence in their own, unique approach to the teaching of undergraduate students; all would be given a mandate and direction to pursue such an approach. Some, or all, might find ways of placing a greater emphasis on general education in the undergraduate curriculum. Most, or all, might develop versions of learning communities, whereby the teaching and learning experience is enriched for faculty and students. And all such institutions could define a mission for faculty which emphasizes their primary role as teachers.

This opportunity will fade in a few years. It is now that the future direction of this expanded system of post-secondary education in British Columbia will be determined; it is now we will make decisions which will set us in directions which will, for years and probably generations, remain essentially unchanged and unchangeable.

The choice is clear. Action must be taken both in public policy and by individual institutions, in order to create a mandate, a will, and a climate for alternatives. In the absence of such concerted effort the moment of opportunity for change will pass, and the grinding imperative of conformity will consume the system. It is not for frivolous reasons that Stuart Smith warns that "the forces at play . . . are simply too powerful . . . ." If the research-based university is taken, as it usually is, as the model for academic excellence, then all our new degree-granting institutions will strive to achieve that kind of excellence. And most will not succeed, for such excellence is rare, and is confined to those institutions with special access to resources and to the services of eminent scholars. Yet this particular image of excellence pervades the post-secondary system here and in the rest of Canada and most of North America.

We do our students no favour by confining their educational environment to conformity with our traditional university system. We must redefine excellence and credibility in degree-granting institutions to include educational quality in undergraduate

programs, and we must look to the richness of the educational experience, rather than the research success of some prominent faculty, to assess this quality. Then the creative and intellectual talents of our faculty can be fully utilized in the pursuit and achievement of educational excellence.

Whichever way our post-secondary system develops, it will be better than it has been. We need more places for students. Providing these places by simply expanding what we have will be much better than providing no places. But we have a rare opportunity to do something exceptional in British Columbia--we can create a network of small, experimental, innovative degree programs with a rich series of alternatives to those available in the research-based universities. But we must act now. Five years from now it will probably be too late. Once new institutions establish themselves along traditional lines it is unlikely that significant change will ever occur. If, on the other hand, through public policy and institutional cooperation, we establish new expectations for the new institutions, we might well witness the evolution of a public post-secondary system of unparalleled richness.